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Egrets of the Sacramento Valley

It was not more than about three decades ago that bird-lovers were filled with alarm over the status of the two species of egrets in California. Plumage traders had, because of the popular demand for "aigrettes," raided breeding colonies with disastrous effects on the birds. Legislation was pushed and finally enacted which effectively put a stop to the destructive business. The response to protection on the part of the egrets was little short of remarkable. The Sacramento Valley, with 90,000 acres of rice fields, is particularly well-suited to the birds, and small numbers began to come back about 1924. By 1930 the American Egret was well re-established, and today it is nearly impossible to drive through the rice country at any time of year without seeing egrets. On November 26, 1937, no fewer than 50 were counted along six miles of highway east of Willows, and a rough estimate placed the population of the low country from Colusa to Willows at about 10 birds per square mile. One farmer near Maxwell, on whose property a colony of about 40 pairs of egrets and night herons were nesting, complained bitterly that the egrets were becoming too numerous; were disturbing his family, fouling his walnut trees with excreta, and cleaning out all the mosquito fish which had been planted in the district. He went so far as to denounce the protective laws as out of date and undesirable!

Both species of egrets are now present in the Valley throughout the year; but "Snowys" have been observed in numbers only in the fall of the year, from late July through September, and again, to a lesser extent, in April and early May. They are apparently more restricted in their choice of habitat than their larger cousins and are rarely found far from tules. As far as is known they do not breed in the Sacramento Valley. "Americans" are widespread during the non-breeding season and may be found singly or in loose aggregations of up to 30 or more wherever there is water. At night larger flocks are formed for the purpose of roosting, and it is an impressive thing to see 60 or more of these magnificent birds coming in to the tree tops at dusk, as at Elkhorn on the Sacramento River. A smaller roost of about 20 birds eight miles southeast of Davis furnished a fine collection of the coveted plumes, shed in July and early August before the main molt of the body feathers had taken place.

Nesting colonies are now known at a number of places in the Valley. The one near Maxwell, already mentioned, was formed in 1934, contained 40 egret nests in 1937 and about 30 in 1938. A colony on the west side of the Sacramento River opposite Butte City was deserted in 1937, the birds possibly having joined a larger colony one mile to the north. The latter contained an estimated 60 pairs of egrets on July 7, 1938, together with 25 pairs of Great Blue Herons. Another good-sized nesting colony of egrets was reported from Butte Creek in the vicinity of Gridley in the spring of 1936. The finest colony of all, however, is located on the east bank of the Sacramento River about three miles below Ord. This colony was discovered by the writer on June 4, 1937, in the tops of tall cottonwood trees which lined the lower part of a small slough. Close to a thousand nests were present, most of them occupied. Counts were difficult to make through the foli-

age, but the following approximations were made: American Egret, 400; Great Blue Heron, 200; Black-crowned Night Heron, 80; Farallon Cormorant, 150. Most of the nests held half-grown young, and the clamor of the birds could be heard for over half a mile.

Undoubtedly there are other colonies in the Sacramento Valley; if any readers of THE GULL know of their whereabouts, the writer would be glad to learn of them.

John T. Emlen, Jr., Division of Zoology, University of California, Davis.



October Field Trip

Sunday, the sixteenth, a beautiful day, found us on our usual October field trip to the Lake Merced region. We again followed the plan of assembling at the Estero Station and proceeded to the head of the smaller lake from that point.

The real birding began as we reached the lake. A Say Phoebe quickly set the stage for a nice exhibition by an American Bittern which stalked up the opposite bank in full view. Rails, both Sora and Virginia, were heard at this point, but were too well concealed to allow any sight observation.

The question was raised as to whether the White-crowned Sparrows singing along the edges of the truck gardens were of the Gambel or of the Puget Sound race. Since neither of these sub-species has been definitely recorded from San Francisco County, a check of these birds would be most welcome. From here we cut across the point to the stand of cypress and pine above the pumping station in an attempt to find the Barn Owls that roost there. While pellets were plentiful, only a brief glimpse of one of the owls was obtained. Creepers, Townsend Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets somewhat offset our disappointment, however.

Noontime arrived all too quickly and we retired to the Broderick-Terry dueling ground for luncheon. Emerging from there, we started along the west side of the larger lake. A Florida Gallinule in fine plumage was very accommodating and gave us some excellent views of himself. Another was seen later but swam into the tules immediately. Wonderful opportunities to watch several Sora Rail as they walked and swam about among the water vegetation kept us busy for some time. Several Red Phalaropes put in an appearance and a Great Blue Heron and the customary Farallon Cormorants were again seen loafing on the water tower. The usual flock of gulls in the middle of the lake proved to be mostly California with but a few Western, Ring-billed and Short-billed Gulls.

By this time the party had shrunk to such proportions that it was possible to provide transportation for all remaining and we drove down the Skyline Boulevard to the point where numerous hawks had been reported. No sooner had the party vacated the cars than a large Golden Eagle flew almost directly overhead in unhurried flight to the south. So close was he that no glasses were required to be able to see the individual feathers of his body. That was the tip-off. From then on exclamations of delight were heard from all sides. Several Red-tailed Hawks were in sight at all times, some near at hand and others at a distance, and Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks were seen twice. They did not approach very closely, however, which was unfortunate as good views of them would have been a treat for us all. Both Marsh and Sparrow Hawks were seen several times as we roamed about over the top of the grassy ridge watching the various raptors. While we were doing so, an owl was flushed that proved to be a Short-eared Owl. Several of the party followed it up and had their efforts richly rewarded by the sight of four in the air at the same time. The meadow mice which were the cause of this avian concentration were often seen and their workings simply honey-combed the ground.

After our thoroughly enjoyable visit with the hawks we returned to the lake to watch the Tricolored Blackbirds come in to roost in the tules. As we watched it became apparent that, while there were three species of blackbirds gathering there, each species confined itself to a separate area. The Tricolored Blackbirds

went directly to their roost among the tules on the west side of the lake, as did the Red-winged Blackbirds to theirs on the east side. The Brewer Blackbirds, of course, were roosting among the pines on the golf courses and we noticed that they, and they alone, took a good bath in the lake before retiring.

While watching at this point we were very much amused at the awkwardness of a Farallon Cormorant perched on one of the electric wires that cross the lake. Also we were surprised to discover a Clapper Rail crouched down near the edge of the lake. After remaining in view for some time, it walked around a grassy point and was lost to view. An effort to chase it out again was very successful in that two of the birds were flushed. They both protested loudly as they flew out into the tules.

It was with regret that we left the lake that day. The beautiful patterns of the blackbirds, their very unharmonious, yet pleasing good-night chorus, combined with a wonderful, calm evening and our memories of the day's events, all joined forces in an attempt to have us stay. They very nearly won, too.

Sixty-six species seen at the lake were as follows:

Eared Grebe	Killdeer	Pipit
Western Grebe	Wilson Snipe	Shrike
Pied-billed Grebe	Red Phalarope	Lutescent Warbler
Farallon Cormorant	Western Gull	Myrtle Warbler
California Heron	California Gull	Audubon Warbler
American Bittern	Ring-billed Gull	Townsend Warbler
Mallard	Short-billed Gull	Yellow-throat
Baldpate	Anna Hummingbird	English Sparrow
Green-winged Teal	Barn Owl	Meadowlark
Shoveller	Kingfisher	S. F. Red-wing
Ring-necked Duck	Red-shafted Flicker	Tricolored Blackbird
Lesser Scaup	Black Phoebe	Brewer Blackbird
Ruddy Duck	Say Phoebe	Purple Finch
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Horned Lark	House Finch
Red-tailed Hawk	Barlow Chickadee	Pine Siskin
Sparrow Hawk	Bush-tit	Willow Goldfinch
Quail	Creepers	S. F. Towhee
Clapper Rail	Vigors Wren	Junco
Virginia Rail	Tule Wren	Nuttall Sparrow
Sora Rail	Robin	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Florida Gallinule	Hermit Thrush	Fox Sparrow
Coot	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Song Sparrow

Eight species seen from Skyline Boulevard:

Red-tailed Hawk	Sparrow Hawk	Green-backed Goldfinch
Ferruginous Rough-legged	Golden Eagle	Savannah Sparrow
Marsh Hawk	Short-eared Owl	

Fourteen members attended, namely: Mesdames Kelly, Woolsey; Misses Blake, Cohen, Hunt, Kennedy, MacIver, McConnell, Rinehart; Messrs. Bolander, Kirker, Power; Mr. and Mrs. Stephens; and nine guests: Messrs. Walter Fitzpatrick, Yosemite; Charles W. Michael, Pasadena; Harry Manheim, Edwin Berliner, Edward Greenhood, Edwin Pike of San Francisco; Mrs. Crone, Misses Giddings and Thomas. Gordon Bolander, Leader and Historian.



Audubon Notes

November Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday, the 10th, at 8 p. m., in room 19, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mr. H. M. Butterfield, Supervisor of Agriculture, Correspondence Courses, University of California, whose subject

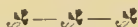
will be "Pioneer Trees in California Gardens."

Members may bring guests.



November Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, the 13th, starting from Ross, Marin County. Buy round-trip ticket and take 8:45 a. m. Sausalito

Ferry. In case of heavy rain, the trip will be taken the following Sunday. Bring luncheon. Mrs. Mary L. Court-right, leader.



October Meeting: The 254th regular meeting was held on the 13th, in room 19, Ferry Building, with twenty-eight members and guests present. President Junea W. Kelly presiding.

The following observations were reported:

Gordon Bolander: Lake Merced, Townsend Warbler, September 18th (early); Skyline Boulevard, San Mateo County, two Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks, October 5th; Prairie Falcon, three White-tailed Kites, 6th.

Mr. Dunshee: Ross, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, October 6th.

Mrs. Kelly: Alameda, Gambel Sparrows, September 28th; Mockingbird, two Barn Owls, October 5th; Cliff House rocks, one Ruddy Turnstone, Surf-bird and Black Turnstones, October 1st; Claremont Hotel grounds, several Townsend Warblers, 5th; Bay Farm Island in golf club pool, one Sora Rail and 11 Black Turnstones; Alameda, Cedar Waxwings, 9th; Hermit Thrush singing and Varied Thrush, 13th.

Harold Kirker: Stow Lake, Golden Gate Park, Wood Duck, October 1st; Creeper and two Ravens, 11th; Winter Wren, 12th.

Charles W. Michael: Golden Gate Park, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, October 9th; Black and White Warbler, September 28th; Black-throated Gray Warbler, October 9th; Hermit Warbler, 6th.

Commander Parmenter. Dumbarton Bridge, 53 White Pelicans, 5 Brewster Egrets, 2000± California Gulls, Septem-

ber 13th; Edgemar, San Mateo County, 3 Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks, September 28th; Sears Point Cut-Off, 16 American Egrets, 16th; 20 Long-billed Curlew, 2000± Avocets, Duck Hawk, 21st; 200± Tree Swallows, 3 Pectoral Sandpipers, October 10th.

Mrs. Stephens: Golden Gate Park, Winter Wren, October 1st; Western Flycatcher, Pileolated Warbler, 9th; Yellow and Lutescent Warblers, 12th.

Alaska Yellow Warblers reported by several observers from September 28th to October 9th; Golden-crowned Sparrow, 12th; Red-breasted Sapsucker, 12th, and in Ross on the 18th.

Laidlaw Williams: Lake Merced, 12 Ring-necked Ducks, October 7th.

Selma Werner: Stow Lake, one pair of Redheads, September 21st; Golden Gate Park, Audubon Warblers (early), Fox Sparrow, Willow Woodpecker, Creeper, Wood Pewee, Yellow-throat, 28th; Allen Hummingbird, 15th, last seen.

Mr. Albert Wolfson, speaker of the evening, spoke on "Experiments in Bird Migration." He gave a sketch of various traditions and theories; the physical theory of the ice age and the biological causes due to over-population. He mentioned the amount of information gained by bird banding on this subject.

Wm. Rowan of Alberta, Canada, worked on the effect of light on the reproductive organs. Other experiments were made to show the effect of continual exercise and the length of time the birds were kept awake. Rowan, in London, worked in the fall. Mr. Wolfson's experiments were on juncos in the spring on the University of California campus.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

President.....	Mrs. G. Earle Kelly.....	1311 Grand St., Alameda, Calif.
Corresponding Secretary.....	C. B. Lastreto.....	260 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....	Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....	1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.

Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, Editor, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.

Membership dues, payable January 1st, \$3.00 per year.

Student memberships, \$1.50 per year.

Life memberships, \$50.00.

Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.